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ABSTRACT

Proactive steps should be taken at the national level to ensure that rural America receives educational and economic opportunities comparable to those provided to the nation's urban regions. This report, by the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC's) Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges, details policy and administrative recommendations related to AACC's national agenda priorities. First, a discussion is provided of rural America's social problems, dispelling some common misconceptions about rural life and demographics. Next, general policy recommendations are reviewed, stemming from the Commission's suggestion that the AACC have one comprehensive concern that affects all Americans: economic viability for the nation, through the preservation of existing jobs, as well as the creation of new jobs in the manufacturing, agriculture, service, and information sectors of the economy. The policy and administrative recommendations adopted by the Commission in its October, 1992 meeting are then provided under the following headings: (1) Advocacy, including specific recommendations concerning economic development, tax and finance, and general education initiatives in rural areas; (2) Research, including several specific recommendations related to the development and operation of an information center for the community college movement, and to the coordination of data collection efforts; and (3) Education and Coordination, offering a recommendation on commission appointments and one on inter-commission cooperation. Finally, the commission's planned activities to support AACC's mission in fiscal year 1993 are outlined. (MAB)

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Forgotten Minorities:
Rural Americans and the Colleges
That Serve Them

REPORT ON AACC NATIONAL AGENDA PRIORITIES

from the

Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges

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American Association of Community College, Washington, DC
Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges

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Forgotten Minorities:

Rural Americans and the Colleges That Serve Them

The urbanization of America, and the problems associated with it, currently consume much of the nation's political energy and resources. Compared to the rest of the nation, urban America is now the focus of both public and private investment in historic proportions. Yet, the rural population of America represents roughly a third of her people and is an important human resource for the nation. Proactive steps should be taken at the national level to insure that rural America receives educational and economic opportunities comparable to those provided to the urban regions of the United States.

Numerous studies show that the societal problems found in the rural areas of the United States are identical to those found in the urban areas of this nation. They differ only in degree. A sampling of some of these problems include:

- consistently high unemployment rates,
- below average per capita income levels,
- high illiteracy rates,
- poverty rates that exceed the national average,
- above average school drop-out rates,

- o above average rates of substance abuse,
- o high rates of birth for young, unwed mothers, and
- o a lack of adequate health care facilities and services.

These problems are often worse in the rural areas of the country than they are in urban regions. For example, rural areas experience a severe lack of health care services, including inadequate medical facilities and a critical shortage in the number of health care professionals.

Contributing to these social problems are important economic differences that are peculiar to rural America, such as the high dependency upon one or two large industries in rural areas. The scarcity of jobs in rural communities can be exacerbated by the failure or relocation of a single major employer. As those industries go, so go the economics and life of the rural communities they serve.

There are many misconceptions about rural life in America. For example, rural communities are not necessarily farm communities. The number of people actually living on farms in America is fewer than five million people, which represents less than one-tenth of the rural population. According to agriculture department estimates, less than twenty percent of rural Americans depend on farm-related occupations as their source of livelihood.

It is also important to note that although Caucasians constitute the largest racial group in rural America, there are rural areas of the nation where true minorities make up the largest proportion of the population: Blacks in the South, Hispanics in the Southwest and California, and Native Americans in states such as Arizona and Montana. The Los Angeles Times reported (March 1992) that:

> the northern inner city minorities are not unique, and by some measures, the black under-class is more highly concentrated in the rural South than in the urban North . . . Blacks living in the rural South are more likely than blacks in the urban North to be members of the under-class.

Small/Rural community colleges have played a critical role in helping rural America address many of these societal problems. Rural community colleges traditionally play a dominant role in the educational, cultural, and social aspects of rural life. They are often the center for rural community and economic development and the primary catalyst for improving the quality of rural life.

Following the restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s, America has apparently retrenched itself in ways that some consider to be dangerously counterproductive over the long term. It has been suggested that the American economy now has a stress fracture which, under societal pressures like those in the 1960s, could break the nation open economically and socially. As the economy further creates a dichotomy of living standards, is it possible that the resulting economic disparity will increasingly create a plethora of social problems throughout America?

Is it possible that as we further become a nation devoid of a middle class we will find that traditional social program band-aids cannot suppress the societal hemorrhaging, where crime and unemployment are epidemic, and jobs increasingly scarce? Some suggest that this scenario is indeed a possibility given the short-term focus of corporate America, where jobs are exported, wages depressed, and the emphasis is on a quick return to the bottom-line.

In this type of environment, what will be the response of the nation's community college system? If an expressed goal of the AACC is to prepare the nation's workforce for the future, what is the responsibility of the Association to enhance job development?

The AACC Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges believes that the AACC should have one comprehensive concern that affects all Americans. That issue has two facets, but it revolves around one central theme -- economic viability for the nation. The two aspects of this issue are the preservation of existing jobs and the creation of new jobs in the manufacturing, agriculture, service and information sectors of the economy.

The Commission therefore recommends to the Board of Directors that the Association set as the top priority for its national agenda the development and preservation of jobs in the American economy. As its second priority, the Commission recommends that

the AACC target those activities specific to the preparation of the workforce for those new jobs and for those jobs that will be rapidly changing as a result of changing technology.

The Commission further recommends that the AACC emphasize within its national agenda ways that America's economy and workforce can be strengthened by strengthening the nation's 600 small/rural community colleges. Such a national agenda is necessary to ensure that the 103rd Congress, and other national leaders, understand that the AACC Legislative Agenda is as important to rural Americans as it is to urban Americans. The members of the Commission believe that it is time to speak on the national level of our commonalities as a community college movement -- not our differences.

The AACC has done an admirable job in the past in addressing workforce issues with such programs as "Keeping America Working" and with partnerships with corporate America, but this Commission emphasizes that such a focus must be a continual priority of the American Association of Community Colleges. A healthy and vibrant economy is critical to both urban and rural America.

Therefore, the Commission further recommends that the Association devote time and resources publicizing, at the national level, that a well-trained workforce is only one variable in a

healthy economy. While our two-year colleges are working to provide a well-trained workforce, the creation and availability of jobs must become a more important initiative for the Association. That is why this Commission believes that the creation and preservation of jobs should be the number one priority at the national level.

This is obviously a political issue and includes government incentives for business development, joint planning by business and government, fair trade issues, and community/economic development issues. Who else, other than the nation's community colleges, is politically, geographically, and philosophically positioned to successfully make such an objective a priority for the nation?

The Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges asks the AACC Board of Directors to advance job development, as well as job training, as its top priority. The members of this Commission attest that the community college movement has been and will continue to be a leader in job training, lifelong learning, educational reform, and other workforce initiatives that are tied directly to this nation's competitiveness. We also believe that as educational leaders we have a responsibility that extends beyond education to that of helping create a national economy. The Commission pledges itself to assisting the Association in this endeavor.

At its October, 1992, meeting, the Commission adopted policy and administrative recommendations related to the new AACC mission statement. These are listed below and relate to the broad issues of advocacy, research, educational services, and coordination.

ADVOCACY

Policy recommendations:

- o that job development and job preservation in America become the Association's top priority initiative within the AACC national agenda.
- o include "public and private areas" within the advocacy section of the AACC mission to advocate unprejudiced support of two-year colleges from corporations and major foundations.
- o endorse all of the initiatives within the AACC Legislative Agenda.
- o advocate the following economic development initiatives:
  - seek ways to extend Carl Perkins funding from its federal sources to more rural colleges with less bureaucratic intervention at the state level.
  - support the expansion and full funding of Tech Prep
  - emphasize greater funding for telecommunications at rural colleges because of their geographic isolation and the great need for distance learning.
  - promote small/rural community colleges as regional centers for workforce development.
- o advocate the following tax and finance initiative:
  - provide financial incentives for the development of partnerships between industry and community colleges to utilize equipment for instruction.

- o advocate the following general education initiatives:
  - support the Price Bill regarding the National Science Foundation and promote demonstration centers for science at rural community colleges to train teachers and expose students to industrial applications of science technology.
  - promote incentives to encourage connections between community colleges, universities, and K-12 systems to develop resources and academic coordination.
  - promote a greater linkage on the national level between the Association and the U. S. Chamber of Commerce to support and recognize the economic development emphases of both organizations.

Administrative recommendations:

- o encourage increased coverage and visibility of the small and rural colleges in AACC publications including a "sliding scale" for purchasing Journal covers, calendar pages, and advertisements in both the Journal and Times.
- o produce a short, top quality video on the AACC and the role of community colleges across the nation, their general mission and objectives; make it available to member institutions at cost to help individual colleges advocate the community college movement at the local level throughout America.

RESEARCH

Policy recommendations:

- o develop an information center concerning the community college movement and relevant higher education statistics that includes the interests of small/rural community

colleges in the collection, analysis, evaluation, and validation of data.

- data should be segregated according to college size, demographics, and designation, so that individual colleges are able to use the data from the information center.
- encourage the AACC to bridge the gap that exists between the data collection efforts of other organizations and the Association.
- encourage data resources such as the National Center for Educational Statistics to include community college interests in the collection and analysis of higher education data.
- urge the AACC to utilize its various commissions to provide input on the design, collection, and analysis of information to "celebrate the diversity" of America's community colleges.
- realizing the costs associated with an information center, we urge the Association to seek ways to augment its resources including using graduate students to conduct specific projects, placing national calls for assistance on approved projects, and making data reports and diskettes available to the AACC membership at reasonable fees to offset costs.
- solicit external funding to support specific research projects.

EDUCATION AND COORDINATION

Policy recommendations:

- o appoint Commission members by using a planned approach that considers regional representation from across the United States (perhaps similar to ACCT regions).
- o require that Commission chairs meet together once or twice a year to compare agendas and develop mutual plans of action that will benefit and promote coordination, intercommission cooperation, and inclusiveness.

In addition, the Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges will pursue the following activities during FY 93 to support the AACC mission:

A. Educational Services - Professional Growth and Renewal

1. present a forum at the AACC convention on the national crisis regarding job creation and retention that includes information on model community college economic development programs.

2. promote AACC convention sessions that have specific interest to small/rural community colleges and their presidents.

3. operate a booth at the AACC convention to provide information on the commission and its work.

4. request that the President's Academy provide more on-going education for presidents including a summary of the issues discussed at the summer retreats to non-participants each year.

5. in response to earlier surveys of presidents on major issues of small/rural colleges, collect and disseminate information on exemplary programs in rural economic development.

B. Coordination

1. work with AACC staff to complete two mailings annually from the Commission to small/rural community colleges.

2. work with AACC staff to identify annual lists of small/rural colleges for mailings and to track membership trends over time.

3. provide articles for AACC Journal and Times on small and rural community colleges.

4. work to increase AACC membership among small/rural colleges by a minimum of 10% in FY 1993.

5. work with AACC staff to identify foundations and corporations that fund initiatives for small/rural community colleges, including an indication of the likelihood of funding for specific program initiatives.

6. establish a clearinghouse for exemplary faculty development programs utilized in small/rural community colleges.

7. distribute model fund-raising ideas to small/rural community colleges with names and addresses of information contacts.

8. distribute model programs for improving math/science education in small/rural colleges.

Respectfully submitted to the AACC Board of Directors at its annual meeting in Washington, DC, November, 1992.

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